

Lions Club Ireland and Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind launch their 3 year partnership

In the few short years between 1925 and 1930, two extraordinary women Helen Keller and Dorothy Eustice set in motion certain events that would positively impact the lives of literally millions of people around the world.

A Brief History of Guide Dogs

As early as 1899 the Director of the German Red Cross Ambulance Dogs Association Dr. Gerhard Stalling, used the battlefield assistance dog in early attempts to guide blinded veterans.

The German Red Cross Ambulance Dogs Association subsequently established a training centre in Oldenberg. The first guide dog was issued in 1916 to a blinded veteran, Paul Feyen. Within a year there were 100 guide dogs issued and 539 guide dogs had been issued by 1919. In 1922, the first classes for civilian blind men commenced. The German Shepherd Dog Association then came into being and opened a training school in 1923 in Potsdam.

George and Dorothy Eustis, who were selectively breeding German Shepherd dogs in their Fortunate Fields kennels in Switzerland, visited the Potsdam School. Highly impressed, Dorothy Eustis was encouraged to work with Potsdam trainers to prepare a dog "Buddy" for her first client Morris Frank from NY, US. The world press and media became enthralled by this extraordinary partnership and the level of confidence, mobility and independence made possible about the street of NY City for Morris Frank.

Mrs. Eustis established the famous Seeing Eye School in Morristown, NJ and subsequently went on to support the development of Guide Dog Associations in Switzerland, France, Italy and the UK. A global movement had begun.

A Brief History of the Lions and "knights of the blind"

Born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, USA, in 1880, Helen Keller developed a fever at 18 months of age that left her blind and deaf.

With the help of an exceptional teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan of the Perkins School for the Blind, Helen Keller learned sign language and braille. A few years later, she learned to speak. As an adult she became a tireless advocate for people with disabilities. And in 1925, she attended the Lions Clubs International Convention and challenged Lions to become "knights of the blind in the crusade against darkness" with these words:

"Will you not help me hasten the day when there shall be no preventable blindness; no little deaf, blind child untaught; no blind man or woman unaided? I appeal to you Lions, you who have your sight, your hearing, you who are strong and brave and kind. Will you not constitute yourselves Knights of the Blind in this crusade against darkness?"

Bringing it all up to today:

The Lions responded to the challenge and from those very early days, Lions Clubs around the world and the Lions Foundation have been extraordinary partners in enabling so many Guide Dog Associations around the world to be established, to grow and to thrive.

The International Guide Dog Federation has 84 member organisations as of 2014, with several applications for membership in the course of being processed.

A bit about Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind:

Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind is a non-profit organisation that provides life-changing services to people who are visually impaired and to families who have children with autism. It was co-founded in 1976 by the late Mrs. Mary Dunlop and our current President Mr. Jim Dennehy. Mrs. Dunlop, who had a major interest in dogs and horses, had been fundraising in Ireland to send people with a vision impairment to the United Kingdom for training with a guide dog.

Jim Dennehy, who had lost his sight 8 years earlier, was the first person in Ireland to train with a long cane. He later trained with a guide dog. Mr Dennehy had travelled to the United Kingdom for his training as there was no organisation in Ireland providing this service.

Mr. Dennehy and Ms. Dunlop recognised the need for a service which was based in Ireland and so Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind was formed.

Lions Club Ireland and Irish Guide Dogs working together:

Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind is an established and trusted charity that supports more than 350 working Guide and Assistance Dog partnerships nationally. We provide unique life-changing services to people who are vision impaired and to families of children with Autism. We continue to provide our services for free to ensure no one is excluded due to lack of income.

The demand for Irish Guide Dogs' services is beyond what we can currently support. We have a waiting list of up to three years for some of our services. We know that by working together we can do better.

With this, Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind has opened its Extraordinary Partnerships Fund to raise €500,000 to meet the increased level and diversity of Client needs by 2020.

Our ambition is to achieve greater than 30% increase in our Guide and Assistance Dog Partnerships. In 2020 Irish Guide Dogs aims to serve more than 500 Partnerships.

This will be achieved through phased investment in our Client Intelligence Programs, and Breeding Diversification Program. This program needs to have the dual impact of improving partner matching ratios and our waiting list times to meet Client needs.

What Lions Club Ireland and Irish Guide Dogs want to achieve together:

Together we can enable people with vision impairment and families of children with autism across Ireland to have brighter, more confident futures through Mobility and Independence. We partner with organisations that have a strong commitment to social inclusion for the development and betterment of our society.

We believe we will be a richer society when we can enable all to participate and contribute across all aspects of society on their own terms. We are a poorer society when we effectively exclude those contributions.

Together we make a tangible difference to society and the lives of our clients, families, friends and colleagues. We hold ourselves accountable in this regards and critically measure our performance and progress in positive social impact.

The Lions Club Ireland and Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind partnership launch:

Lions Club Ireland was delighted to make a presentation of €34,500 to the Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind, marking the start of the partnership with the Irish Guide Dogs “Breeding Diversification Program”.



L-R: Paul Allen (Vice District Governor Ireland), Padraig Mallon (CEO, Irish Guide Dogs For The Blind), Marion Connelly (District Governor, Lions Ireland), Teresa Dineen (Vice District Governor) with dogs Ubi and Wizard !

Commenting on the partnership, Marion Connelly stated: “It is a pleasure to be presenting this cheque to the Irish Guide Dogs, who do tremendous work for so many people across the country. The Lions internationally have a long and distinguished record of support for people with vision impairment and have held the title of “Knights of the Blind” since 1929. Equally the Lions have worked with disadvantaged youth and our older citizens to promote and work on the fullest social inclusion for all. I would like to thank all the Lions Clubs who

have contributed so generously to date and encourage all to help us to raise these vital funds for the Irish Guide Dogs.”

Padraig Mallon CEO, Irish Guide Dogs, said: “We would like to thank the Lions for their immense generosity. By donating your time and helping to raise much needed funds, you are really playing an important and significant role in supporting our operations here at Irish Guide Dogs. 80% of our income comes from fundraising and donations so it really is vital to enabling us to continue to transform lives and work to improve communities.

The funds raised by Lions will go directly into our breeding diversification program which each year will build and bring about significant improvements in our partnership matching ratios and will significantly reduce our waiting lists allowing us to get to ever more people in need and sooner.”

Many thanks also to all at Trabolgan for such an enjoyable afternoon of chat, music and entertainment.



L-R & T-B: Ophelia and Elsa; Una Deasy Community fundraising & Volunteer care manager with Irish Guide Dogs joins Lions DG and VDGs; Ian Freyne Irish Guide Dogs trainer with Elsa enjoying a chat with Lions hosted Trabolgan visitors and Pat McCoolle with Ubi and Wizard.

For more information on how you can get involved with Irish Guide Dogs please contact len.loyd@guidedogs.ie and/or mobile 087 1312604. We would love to hear from you and only too delighted to help in any way we can.